

A CHAT WITH GENERAL OTIS

He Talks About the Philippines and His Conduct of the War.

FRANK G. CARPENTER

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Manila, March 7, 1900.—I spent last evening with General Otis at his place in Malacanang, one of the most fashionable of the suburban streets of Manila. His residence is the house erected for the Spanish governors general of the Philippines, a great two-story structure, with floors of Filipino mahogany with a polished top of a new plane, windows of opalescent oyster shells and walls and ceilings of cedar and painted with flowers, cupids and heathen gods. The ceilings are very high, the rooms and halls large and airy, and at night, when the tinsel and cheapness which characterize parts of the building are softened by the rays of the electric light, the place is really imposing. It has extensive grounds filled with tropical plants and trees, and the air about it is saturated with the sweet perfume of orange blossoms. There are soldiers on guard at all angles, black of the streets that lead to it. My carriage was stopped at the gate, and it was only upon saying that I had a special appointment with the general that I was permitted to pass in on foot. I found more sentries walking up and down under the porte cochere, and I waited in the hall until an orderly took up my card and returned with the answer that the military governor would see me.

I found General Otis in his workshop—an office and bed room combined. It had evidently been used as a parlor or music room in the days of the Spaniards, for its decorations are Spanish and seem quite out of place with its present practical, hard-working surroundings. Large writing desks have taken the place of the piano, and a plain brass bedstead with a mosquito netting attachment has ousted the divan. Last night the desks were filled with manuscripts, documents and blank books containing translations of the Spanish concessions as to the cable, street car, telephones and electric lights of Manila, which the general had brought home to study. He pushed these aside and for two hours chatted freely with me about the situation and the conditions now prevailing in the Philippines.

PEN PICTURE OF GENERAL OTIS.

Before I report our conversation let me show you General Otis as he appears at first sight. His picture in the newspapers does not fairly present him. As photographed he seems to be a tall, portly man, with a big head and luxuriant side whiskers. The real General Otis does not weigh more than 150 pounds. He stands about five feet eight inches in his stockings and in slender build. His head is not at all large or imposing. The face would be small were it not for the whiskers, which are of silver gray mixed with black, well covering the hollows of the cheeks and extending below the jaw a half finger's length. He has an overhanging gray mustache, iron gray hair and very heavy black eyebrows. His eyes are small, bright and black. He has a good forehead, a trifle narrow, perhaps, a straight nose and a rather determined mouth. He was dressed yesterday in a plain business suit, lacking the vest, and he looked more like an ordinary business man than a general in command of one of the greatest armies, and the absolute ruler of a country 1,000 miles long, inhabited by 8,000,000 as turbulent people as now exist out of South Africa.

General Otis' entire lack of military airs is the more striking considering his length of service. He has been in the ranks ever since the beginning of the civil war, when at twenty-one he left the practice of the law to go to the field. He was wounded in the head near the close of the war and mustered out, but the doctors told him his wound would not permit him to live in the East, and he accepted an offer of service in the regular army upon the frontier. There he gradually rose until 1893, when he became a brigadier general, and then major general here in May, 1898. During our conversation I asked him how he came to be sent to the Philippines. He replied that he was pitched into them without having any say in the matter, and that he was only here because he had been ordered to come.

GENERAL OTIS ON THE SITUATION.

Later on I asked him if he were satisfied with the results of his work. General Otis replied:

"I can't say that I am, for I am anxious that the islands should be in a much better state, and that state, I think, will soon come. I will say, however, that we have put down the insurgents as far as any organized resistance is concerned, and that the condition of the Philippines is now as good as it has been at any time for ten years. In many places the country is as safe as it has been during the past generation. In Mindanao, the Spaniards did not dare to go outside the limits of their army posts. They were always in trouble with the natives, and in many places had their dead lies over which the Moros shot by their sentries. Now our troops are moving about without arms outside the posts, and many expeditions have been taken into the mountains. Here in Luzon there have always been robber bands in the mountains which have preyed upon the people. The country has never been really safe."

"Do you think you can make it so, general?" I asked.

"Yes, in time, but we must keep on destroying the bandits wherever we find them. Many of the insurgents have joined some bands, and it will take some months yet to clean up the country."

WILL NEED SOLDIERS FOR YEARS.

"This will, I suppose, necessitate the keeping of a large force here on the islands, even after peace has been established, will it not?"

"Yes," was the reply. "We shall need as many as we have now for at least a year, and perhaps longer. We shall have to garrison the most of the towns and show the people that we intend to protect them. After a year or so, when the conditions have become settled, the forces can be greatly reduced."

"How about Americans attempting to travel alone throughout the Philippines? Do you consider it safe?" I asked.

"No, I do not," said General Otis. "I don't think Americans should go into the interior without they are in pairs or are with the soldiers, for Englishmen, but in the mountains no one is safe. There is no telling when you may be attacked by a band of bandits or so-called insurgents, who, if you are an American, will have the right to rob and kill you under the pretext of war."

WOULD CUT PRISONERS' THROATS.

"But, general," said I, "if the organized resistance has stopped, as you

say, why can't you declare the war at an end and treat the rebels as men here and murderers and hang or shoot them when you take them? This would soon put an end to their business, would it not?"

"It might," said General Otis, "but if we did that it would also put an end to the lives of one hundred or more of our soldiers who are now prisoners in their hands. They would cut their throats as soon as the proclamation was issued. These prisoners are men who have in one way or another wandered away from their brigades or companies and been captured."

"As to the robbers," continued the general, "and in this I include the insurgents, the people in most of the districts are afraid to inform against them. They not only attack the Americans, but also rob the natives. This is especially so with the Tagalos. Their patriotism is of a pocket book nature. They are in the war only for what they can get out of it, and if they cannot get anything from us they will prey upon their own people."

THE NATIVES AS AMERICAN SOLDIERS.

"If that is the case they would fight for pay," said I. "Why not use them as soldiers? England has a native army in India."

"We may be able to do that at some time in the future," said Gen. Otis, "but at present we dare not trust any large number of them in our ranks. We have about 120 native scouts with our troops at Iloilo. They are doing well and fight their brothers quite as well as they fight us. All they seem to care for is their pay. They are liable to be treacherous, however, and we keep a close watch."

THE PROPERTY OWNERS AGAINST WAR.

"What classes of the people are they who are carrying on the war? Do the public property owners really want to continue the struggle?"

"The war," replied the general, "has been largely fomented by the professional politicians, fellows like Aguinaldo and others who expect to make fortunes out of the agitation. The richer Filipinos, and, in fact, almost all of the property owners, are tired of the struggle. They don't want the Americans to leave them to the mercy of their own people. They have come to me and begged me to say that if we go the result will be anarchy, ending in one or more of the powers of Europe stepping in and taking possession of the islands. This is the feeling of many Filipinos who have taken part in the insurrection. Mabini told me that this was his view, and when I asked why in that case he had been fighting us he replied:

"Oh! We are fighting for the best terms we can get out of you. We believe that you would grant us more rights if we fought for them."

THOUGHT THE AMERICANS WOULD GIVE UP.

"But, general," said I, "did the Filipinos really believe that they could successfully resist us?"

"Yes, I think some of them did," replied General Otis. "They thought they could tire us out. Some think this even now, and they come to me and beg me to tell them that they are wrong, but I do not allow the government to take the soldiers away from the country. I tell them they need have no fear of that, at least not as long as the war lasts, and that the Americans will make war they may rely upon it that they will all stick together until they have conquered."

NOT FIT TO GOVERN THEMSELVES.

"What do you think of these people as prospective high-grade American citizens, general? Are they at all fit to govern themselves?"

"They have a long way to go before they will be what you call high-grade citizens," replied Gen. Otis. "They are not now fit to govern themselves and will not be for a long time. They might perhaps be awarded certain liberties of government under our direction, but as to their conducting a republic themselves and honestly administering the government that is at present an impossibility."

"It is an impossibility from the nature and education of the people," said General Otis. "They have been trained under the Spaniards and bred in political corruption. They have little idea of truth between man and man as to political and official acts. Why, I have often had two prominent Filipinos counseling with me over some important matter, and they would assent to statements of the other, and I would think them in perfect accord, but later on each would come privately to me and tell me not to trust the other."

"The Filipinos have been accustomed to bribing and being bribed, and they can't get rid of the idea that that is the only way to accomplish results. We have tried them here in the custom house and elsewhere and found that they have systematically cheated the government and pocketed the proceeds. I had, for instance, a father and son of a good family in the customs. I sent the son to act as one of the customs officers of Cebu. I soon found that the father and son were in collusion and that they were sending in false manifests and thereby stealing thousands of dollars. I dismissed them, of course. We have to keep a close watch on our customs officials here," continued General Otis, "for we should be robbed right and left, for we have many native employees. The result of our watchfulness is that the customs receipts are far greater in proportion than ever before."

NO CARPET BAGGERS WANTED.

"How would a civil government of American citizens do for the islands, general?" I asked.

General Otis replied: "I don't think we want the American politician or statesman, as you call him, for a long time yet, if ever. If the United States organizes a civil service for the Philippines it should be one carefully chosen, well paid and not affected to any extent by home politics. Care should be taken to get honest men, for the dishonest official would have great opportunities for fraud of all kinds. You cannot conceive the possibilities the officials of the past here had in the way of lining their pockets. Why, I could make \$100,000 within the next three weeks if I wanted to use my office for my own profit. These people are accustomed to bribery. They expect to pay for everything, and are surprised that they are not asked to do so. They cannot realize that men may be honest for honest sake."

A MILITARY GOVERNMENT NECESSARY.

"I think the military government should be kept here for a couple of years. These people need a government that will govern, and that arbitrarily. They need it to protect themselves. There are all kinds of schemes afoot to contend with. The Filipinos themselves are very cunning. They know how to corner the markets

and how to raise and lower prices. They would do so on meat and other staple articles if I did not prevent them. We have, you know, the right to fix prices. I can make meat cost \$1 or 40 cents a pound by a stroke of my pen."

"When you have thoroughly pacified the islands will they stay pacified, or will we have continual rebellions, as in the South American countries?"

"I fear there will be occasional rebellions," was the reply. "The Tagalos are natural politicians and schemers. They are revolutionary in their tendencies, and for a long time there will be some among them who will foment trouble for their own personal aggrandizement and profit."

"Give me some idea of Aguinaldo, general, is he a strong man?"

"No," said Gen. Otis. "I do not consider Aguinaldo a man of force or patriotism. He is a silent fellow, and has gotten a reputation for wisdom by keeping his mouth shut. He has shown by his actions that he has little personal bravery, and that he also went into the war for what he could make out of it. I believe Mabini to be the stronger man of the two. I have him now under surveillance here in Manila. For a time I even permitted him to write for the papers, but he began to attack the United States government, and I had to stop him."

A WORD ABOUT THE FRIARS.

"How about the friars?" I asked.

"I can't just say what will be done if the church men of the most serious ones we have to settle. Archbishop Chappelle thinks he will be able to arrange it so as they will be able to stay and hold their property, but many of the Filipinos do not like them, and in many places they will not be permitted to come back to their churches. They are causing me a great deal of trouble. Just now they are clamoring to have their churches reconsecrated to the public use. I have told them I could not permit that, and that if parents want their children to have religious instruction they must get it outside the schools supported by the government. We have had a question with them as to the marriage question, and there will also be considerable trouble as to titles and church property."

TOO SOON FOR RAILWAYS AND OTHER INVESTMENTS.

The conversation here turned to the possibilities of the islands, and I asked General Otis if he thought there were many opportunities here for our capitalists.

"He replied that the resources of the country were enormous, and that there would undoubtedly be many chances for money making as soon as the country was perfectly quiet.

"At present," said he, "we need the army to keep peace and put down the insurgents, and we cannot spare troops to protect American enterprises, such as the building of railroads. There is no doubt, however, that there are many places where roads can be built at a profit. A number of lines have already been surveyed, notably some along Laguna de Bay and into the southern and eastern provinces. There are men now in Washington trying to get concessions for constructing such roads."

"Then there are other projects contemplated which will be carried out later on. Some things are hampered by the Spanish concessions, such as the cable and other matters, but they will be satisfactorily settled."

GREAT CHANCES FOR MONEY MAKERS.

As to the general outlook for the development of the Philippines along profitable lines, I think it is good and that there will be many opportunities for money making here in the future. The country is beyond conception rich and much of it has hardly been scratched. There are large tracts of virgin soil; there are deposits of iron, gold, copper and coal, and the coal deposits are said to be extensive and of good quality. The mountains are full of minerals and they are practically unexplored. Agriculturally there is no better soil anywhere than in most parts of these islands. The land will support many times its present population."

THE QUESTION OF LABOR.

"How about labor, general? Is it said the Filipino will not work?"

"I think that is a mistake," replied General Otis. "These people have never had a chance to work for good wages. They have never been paid for their work. The Spaniards gave them about \$5 in silver a month, about 10 cents gold a day, and many of the officials took out a commission from these wages. Since we came the labor has risen. The men are receiving the full wages agreed upon, and they are working very well. I believe we have already proved that the Filipinos can do the work of the country and that they will do it if they are paid fairly. At first they could not understand why we did not withhold a portion of the wages for ourselves."

"Do you think they will ever become friendly to the Americans?" I asked.

"Yes," replied General Otis, "when through us they see the time becoming good, themselves growing prosperous and their country rich. Many of them are afraid we will trust and monopolize all the good things of the islands. They are afraid the Filipinos will be degraded as laborers. They do not trust us yet, but in time this distrust will pass away."

"Then you think our occupation of the Philippines a good thing, general?" I asked.

"Whether it is good for us or not, we have acquired them in such a way that it is impossible to give them up. I have never been an expansionist, and I doubt whether I ever will be one in the ordinary sense of the word, but the islands have been forced upon us and we must go ahead and do our best for them."

THE PRESS CORRESPONDENTS.

"How about your trouble with the newspaper correspondents? They have claimed that you would withhold the news of the war and have not allowed the whole truth to be sent to the papers."

"At this question the general's face darkened and I saw that I was on delicate ground. He answered, however, saying:

"I have tried to have the truth sent home and have interfered with the correspondents as little as possible."

"How about the charges that you have increased the numbers of the Filipino dead?"

"That is not true," was the reply. "I have always been conservative in my reports of our engagements, and have usually reduced the figures to be on the safe side. I have given orders to the officers that they must send out reliable men to count the dead after every engagement, and have done all I could to arrive at the exact number."

With this the interview closed and the general went back to his papers.

As to General Otis' administration I find here quite a difference of opinion among the civilians and also among the officers of the army. He has strong friends and numerous critics. Some of the generals say privately that they think the war could be settled with one or two short dashing campaigns, while others, closer, perhaps, in the councils of the administration, believe that the present policy is not only the one that will result in permanent peace but that it is the only one.

I find no question, however, as to Gen. Otis' honesty of purpose and his fidelity to his duties. He is the hardest worked man in the army. He rises at half-past five every morning, and by half past seven has finished his breakfast and driven to the palace in the walled city, two miles away. Here he works steadily till 12:30, when he drives home for lunch, returning before 2 o'clock to his desk. He keeps at it from then on until 6 and always takes a stack of papers and documents home when he leaves for the day. He has an hour or so for dinner, and then works until 11 and often until midnight. With-in the past few weeks he has been playing a game or so of billiards after supper for exercise, but outside of this he has had no rest or recreation. He never drives out for pleasure, calls upon nobody and does not attend either public or private functions. He is possessed by the demon of perpetual work and is a very firm for details. He wants to know everything, and I am told there are precious few things which go on that he does not know.

During my interview I referred to the charge made that he devoted too much of his strength to little things. He replied that such knowledge was necessary to the successful conduct of his administration, and that he had to know all in order to act promptly and in the right way.

At the same time it is evident that he could have handled the more easily if he devoted himself entirely to them and left the carrying out of his plans to his subordinates. He has good men about him. His right hand and chief of staff is Gen. Theodore Schwann, one of the ablest and bravest of the officers of our army, who has just made a new record for himself by his dashing campaign through that hotbed of the insurgents, the most dangerous provinces of southern Luzon. Gen. Schwann is an admirer of Gen. Otis, and he thoroughly approves of his policy. The two men are in some ways much alike. Both say they would rather be fighting in the field than at work here in Manila, and from what I know of their characters I doubt not they both speak the truth.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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